



Hansen Has Walked the Walk, Can Talk the Talk

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is one in a series featuring DATCP employees and their programs.

MADISON – Dave Hansen has walked the walk and can talk the talk. For 23 years, Hansen was a dairy farmer in Vernon County. Now, he brings this on-farm experience to the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) as the Rural Electric Power Services (REPS) Program Supervisor. In this role, Hansen also leads the Herd-Based Diagnostic Program.

“The most frequent comment from farmers that Dave has helped has been that they just can’t believe they didn’t know about the Rural Electric Program and our Herd Based Diagnostic Services,” said Mike Powers, DATCP’s Agricultural Development Division Administrator. “He’s a great resource. Dave has a natural way of putting people at ease. It makes it easy to figure out what the cows need and the results are almost always more milk of higher quality.”

Hansen received a degree in education from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He taught high school for one year before returning to his family’s dairy farm.

After leaving the farm, Hansen worked for the Private Industry Council in La Crosse helping farmers and farm family members acquire training to find off-farm employment to supplement the families’ income. It was a natural fit for Hansen to join the DATCP Farm Center team in 2000 and supervise the REPS Program.

The Rural Electric Power Services Program (REPS) is a jointly administered program with the Wisconsin Public Service Commission. DATCP staff, including Hansen, work with farmers on stray voltage and power quality issues. While most of his clients are dairy farmers, all farmers can take advantage of these services.

“Much of the wiring on farms was installed many years ago and may have become outdated for the needs of electrical equipment of today,” said Hansen. “By updating farm wiring, you are eliminating wiring hazards, reducing stray voltage concerns and making an investment to save energy costs over time. If a farmer believes a possible electrical problem may exist, a call should be placed to DATCP’s Farm Center.”

Electric utilities and cooperatives offer farm rewiring programs to qualified applicants through cost-share programs to reduce the farmers’ out-of-pocket expense. These programs consist of grants and loans for the projects. All of the work is inspected before and after a project by a state electrical inspector and wiring done by a certified electrician. Farm wiring takes special skill, and to learn these skills, electricians take Farm Rewiring Certification Classes. This electrician education is an 18-hour course that needs to be updated every three years. These courses are offered by technical colleges and service providers. DATCP keeps a Certified Electricians List of about 1,400 qualified electricians who have completed the necessary trainings.

Over the past 12 years while Hansen has been with the program, more than 4,500 farmers have benefited from the utilities Farmstead Rewiring Programs. Some farmers have used the program services once, paid back loans for rewiring, and then come back to use the services again.



Dave Hansen is DATCP’s Rural Electric Power Services (REPS) Program Supervisor.

Sometimes, situations can get difficult. If needed, the REPS program acts as a liaison between a power company and the farmer to assist in dispute resolution. Farm Center staff can also assist farmers sort out options that may be available to avoid a service disconnect or settle a dispute.

The services offered by Hansen and his team go beyond electrical. Recently, the REPS program implemented the Herd-Based Diagnostic Program. When farmers identify an issue, such as a high somatic cell count, low production or reproductive issues, the Herd-Based Diagnostic Program can help.

To be involved with this program, the farmer completes an application, which gives program staff a short history of the farm. Hansen will forward the application to one of the two veterinarians who work with the program. The veterinarian will then schedule a time to visit the farm to analyze the situation. The program is designed to look at the wellness of the entire herd, not just a few of the animals.

The DATCP veterinarian will also contact local service professionals who work with the farmer and work together as a team to address the health concerns of the farm. These local professionals may include a nutritionist, the local veterinarian, dairy plant representative or other individuals the farmer wants included. This program is free of charge to the applicant and each case is different. Services have been provided to dairy farmers with a couple dozen cows to hundreds of cows.

“Our vets, Dr. John Roberts and Dr. John Marks, have some of the best cow-side manners and the ability to work with farmers to create solutions,” added Hansen. “If you are having an issue affecting your productivity and profitability, we are here with the resources to help.”

Hansen has always been active in the agricultural community. He currently serves as the representative for DATCP on the Farm Technology Days Board.

The demand for the REPS Program and Herd Health Diagnostic Program services varies. As milk prices go down and input costs go up, calls usually increase. But the Farm Center is always here, ready to help.

“The best part of my job is getting out on the farms and meeting with the farmers themselves,” concluded Hansen. “Our goal is to earn each farmer’s trust and satisfaction when assisting with electrical difficulties and herd health. We hope by building relationships, word of our services will spread between farmers so we can do more for the industry.”

To contact the Wisconsin Farm Center, call 800-942-2474. You can also connect with DATCP on Twitter at twitter.com/widatcp or Facebook at facebook.com/widatcp.

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